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SUBJECT: UNC EXECUTIVE/DOOKERAN DIVORCE ALMOST FINAL

REF: A. PORT OF SPAIN 00523

- [1](#)B. PORT OF SPAIN 00405
- [1](#)C. PORT OF SPAIN 00505
- [1](#)D. PORT OF SPAIN 00676
- [1](#)E. PORT OF SPAIN 00783

Classified By: DCM, Eugene P. Sweeney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: On June 28, the UNC Executive passed a motion of no confidence in UNC Political Leader Winston Dookeran and dismissed three of his leading supporters. Dookeran was unmoved, as he continued his campaign trek around the country in an effort to rally UNC and broader voter support in his battle for control of the UNC and in his ultimate bid to topple the ruling PNM government at the next election. The &no confidence8 motion is expected to lead, over the next six weeks, to a final decision by the UNC general membership on Dookeran's status and thereby on the overall fate of the party. In the meantime, Prime Minister Manning ponders when precisely to call the next election, based on the likely strength or weakness of his opposition, on the government's progress in the fight against crime, on poll results and on the general mood of the nation. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) At its regularly scheduled weekly meeting on June 28, the Executive council of the Opposition United National Congress (UNC) passed a motion of no confidence in Winston Dookeran, the party's political leader whom it had elected to that position. Without explanation, the Executive also dismissed from their duties UNC senators Carolyn Seepersad Bachan and Sadiq Baksh and Executive member Carol Cuffie-Dowlat all of whom had been supportive of Dookeran. At the time of the UNC Executive meeting, Dookeran was addressing his own followers at one of the many meetings he has been conducting around the country. In an immediate response to the UNC Executive's motion of no confidence in him, Dookeran told the crowd that the UNC Executive had itself lost the confidence of the UNC membership, long long ago.

UNC DISINTEGRATION SUMMARIZED

[1](#)3. (U) To anyone watching the growing disarray within the top hierarchy of the UNC, this critical chapter in the unfolding struggle for control of the party between its entrenched leadership and the Dookeran faction was no surprise. Relations between Dookeran and what he dubs &the cabal8 on the UNC Executive council have been on a down hill slide since October 2005. At that time, the iconic Basdeo Panday anointed Dookeran as UNC political leader while simultaneously diluting his authority by retaining for himself the posts of party chairman and, more significantly,

parliamentary opposition leader.

¶4. (U) As long as Panday had his hands on the reigns of the UNC, the professorial and charismatically challenged Dookeran did nothing more threatening than use his trademark non-confrontational style to advocate for a &new politics8.

Addressing not only the UNC membership but the wider electorate, he called for a national, detribalized consensus and for a political culture diametrically opposed to the traditional &I win, you lose8 brand of T&T,s power politics. Even though Dookeran loyalists Robin Montano, Roy Augustus and Gerald Yetming had been summarily fired or had removed themselves from the UNC leadership, Dookeran himself was still willing to appear publicly as an integral member of the UNC leadership, as recently as February 19 when controversial, former UNC Attorney General Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj was first re-accepted into the UNC fold.

¶5. (U) However, once Panday was convicted on April 24 of failing to declare a London bank account, relieved of his party chairmanship and replaced as opposition leader by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Dookeran was much more willing to take the gloves off and engage in some disingenuous posturing of his own. For the past two months, Persad-Bissessar repeatedly expressed her desire to meet with Dookeran and mend fences with him, but never quite managed to do so. Dookeran, on the other hand, while also calling for party unity, seemed to go out of his way to deepen the gulf between him and &the cabal8 by, among other actions, scheduling his campaign appearances to conflict with the weekly meetings of the Executive of which he is a member. In a June 12 letter to the Executive, Dookeran blasted &the cabal8 for not consulting with him on important decisions, including the election of an opposition leader to replace Panday as well as the suspension and expulsion respectively of Gary Griffith and Manohar Ramsaran, both of them supportive of him. For their part, Persad-Bissessar and her allies in the leadership attacked Dookeran for attempting to establish within the UNC a ¶llel organization8.

WHERE DOES THE UNC GO FROM HERE

¶6. (U) The UNC Executive,s &no-confidence8 motion has left Dookeran unmoved. He clearly believes, based on the large crowds which reportedly attend his meetings on the campaign trail, that he is the only UNC leader credibly able to lead a united UNC into power at the next election. In fact, according to Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Dookeran has urged her to abandon her ties to &the cabal8 and join his camp, an offer she says she declined. If true, this was a bold move on Dookeran,s part, demonstrating that he may have not only seminar-leading abilities but political hand-to-hand combat skills too.

¶7. (SBU) Some Dookeran supporters claim the UNC Executive,s &no-confidence8 motion contravened the UNC party constitution and should be answered legally. Others, such as Gerald Yetming who now chairs an embryonic coalition of small &third force8 parties known as the Democratic National Alliance (DNA), have called on Dookeran to leave the UNC and establish his own independent presence in the electoral arena. In fact, Yetming would ideally like to see Dookeran as the DNA,s standard-bearer in the next election campaign. Without Dookeran, the DNA is nothing more than &Dookeran light8; with him, the DNA may grow into a force to be reckoned with, although it has already lost one of its component groupings due to internal disagreements.

¶8. (U) By all accounts, the UNC Executive,s &no-confidence8 motion was only the penultimate chapter in this battle for the soul and control of the UNC. Both factions are now waiting for the final chapter, the verdict of the UNC general membership. They will not have to wait long: between July 16 and August 13, the youth wing of the party, the women,s wing of the party and the party,s national assembly are scheduled to convene, at which time

they will all be asked to express their loyalties, and then maybe, just maybe, the fate of the UNC will finally be settled.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: The choice for UNC grassroots voters may be painful, but the differences between the Dookeran camp and &the cabal8 are clear. Dookeran, the academic and former central bank governor, is widely regarded as clean-cut and likeable even by many less ideologically committed supporters of the People,s National Movement (PNM), let alone by the historically unaffiliated voters who are disgusted with traditional T&T politics and wonder why Dookeran did not leave the UNC a long time ago. On the other hand, many in &the cabal8 are weighed down by heavy baggage. In T&T,s racially divided politics, they may still be able to galvanize their hard-core Indo-Trinidadian base, but Basedo Panday is legally besieged; Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj (&the great betrayer8, as Robin Montano loves to call him) is suspect; and Jack Warner, the &sugar daddy8 of T&T soccer, who eagerly bathes in the glow of the nation,s World Cup heroes, is known to move his political loyalties as readily as pawns on a chess board and has been portrayed in a recent BBC investigative documentary as a totally corrupt sports marketing tycoon. If Dookeran does in fact succeed in drawing the relatively unsullied Kamla Persad-Bisessar away from this unprincipled trio, it may just turn out to be the coup de grace for the UNC. This is not a far-fetched notion: after all, just as Panday chose Persad-Bisessar for his successor he can just as easily unchoose her, and, in any case, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj seems to be eyeing the position of Opposition Leader for himself.

¶10. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: In the interim, Prime Minister Patrick Manning bides his time, watching the ruling PNM,s opposition disintegrate, into how many pieces nobody knows. It is Manning who will decide when before the end of 2007 to call the next general election. The state of the UNC will be just one factor influencing his decision. Other factors will be the progress made by the government in combating crime, whatever conclusions may be drawn from a variety of pre-election polls, and the overall mood of this sports-crazy country, in the wake of the Soccer World Cup and in the lead up to, and following, next year,s Cricket World Cup. END
COMMENT
SWEENEY